

"Piece of floating driftwood"

Drawer 6A

Spurious Quotations

71.2004 08.05.003

Abraham Lincoln Quotations & Sayings Spurious “Piece of Floating Driftwood”

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

10458 WILKINS AVENUE
LOS ANGELES, CA. 90024
September 30, 1977

Dear Mr. Hickey:

Thank you for your letter enclosing the application form for the Abraham Lincoln Association, and explaining that, as I had guessed, the Howells biography is kept closed to avoid any possible effect of light on Lincoln's penciled notes.

May I ask a favor. Although I have the Collected Works, and Lincoln Day By Day, there is a phrase I have never been able to locate. Can you help. In Vol 1 of Lincoln Day By Day on page 15 the familiar statement is made that Lincoln arrived in New Salem late in July 1831 a "piece of floating driftwood" (as he later described himself it says). My question is where did Lincoln so describe himself.

So many authors use this wonderful phrase but - on what authority?

Regards.

Sincerely yours
Richard Lohby.



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October 11, 1977

Mr. Richard Colby
10458 Wilkins Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90024

Dear Mr. Colby:

Your letter of September 30 has been received. I am sorry but I am not able to find the source of the supposed statement by Abraham Lincoln upon arriving at New Salem "piece of floating driftwood." I suspect it was used by one of the early campaign biographers, 1860, but I am not able to read through them to confirm this. In any case, it is not part of any of the documented statements by Lincoln.

Sincerely,


James T. Hickey
Curator, Lincoln Collection

JTH/hm

10458 WILKINS AVENUE
Los Angeles, Ca. 90024

October 15, 1977

Mr. James T. Hickey
Curator, Lincoln Collection
Illinois State Historical Library
Springfield Illinois 62706

Dear Mr. Hickey

Thank you for your reply of October 11
to my letter dated September 30 inquiring
as to the origin of the phrase "a piece of
floating driftwood". If I may continue
our correspondence —

I find the phrase first used by
Herndon : on page 100 of my paper back 1961
Premier Civil War Classic published by Fawcett
of Herndon's life of Lincoln with introduction by
Paul Angle ; also on page 39 of The Lincoln
Reader quoting Herndon ; also on page 9 of
Paul Horzani's great Citizen of New Salem
(which acknowledges your assistance) also
quoting Herndon.

Since Herndon says "He assumed those"

with whom he came in contact that he was a piece of floating driftwood; that after the winter of deep snow, he had come down the river with the fresher; borne along by the swelling waters, and aimlessly floating about, he had accidentally lodged at New Salem."

This leads me to think that Herndon must have collected this recollection, and that the source may be in the Herndon-Weik papers. Ah - but where. I do not have Hertz's "The Hidden Lincoln" - maybe there.

It is such a humble and graphic phrase, I would love to track it down.

If what I have mentioned should suggest the answer to you I would appreciate hearing from you again.

Sincerely

Richard Lalby.

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